

NEWS RELEASE

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UC Cooperative Extension

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UCCE Master Gardeners Association of Mariposa Co.

RAIN, RAIN, GO AWAY

Like the children's nursery rhyme, most of us, by now, have had our fill of liquid sunshine. Doesn't Mother Nature realize that spring started nearly a month ago?

Normally, as soon as the weather turns warm and trees begin to leaf out, thoughts turn to digging in the soil and landscaping around our property. Instead, this year we're shoveling the snow off the sidewalk and looking for detours around flooded roads. But – soon, these, too, will pass, and homeowners will want to start "gussy" up their landscape.

Despite our love of ease, worthwhile endeavors require time, money, and lots of hard work. *Recently I read about a business consultant who hired the best horticulturist he could find to create a landscape for his grounds. Because the businessman traveled so much, he kept emphasizing the garden must require little or no maintenance on his part. Finally the horticulturist stopped and said, "There's one thing you need to deal with before we go any further. **If there is no gardener, there's no garden!**"* Excerpt from *Fresh Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching* by Edward K. Powell

Before embarking on a landscape transformation, there are some things homeowners should consider in order to ward off the depression and frustration involved with all that yard work and gardening. First, if they are considering using a landscaping contractor, they need to keep in mind a few vital issues.

First, make sure your potential landscaper has a license in the state of California. You can check their status by contacting the California Contractors State Licensing Board; and remember if you are dealing with electrical, retaining walls, or putting in a new driveway, make certain they are knowledgeable in that area. Below are a few tips offered by the **California Landscape Contractors Association**:

- **Get competitive bid for the project:** *Solicit at least three bids for the work you need. The lowest is not necessarily the best.*
 - **Three-day cancellation period:** *The law gives a homeowner the right to cancel a contract within three business days of signing it, provided it was solicited at someplace other than the contractor's place of business—such as your home. Use those three days to review your contract again.*
 - **Warranties:** *Be sure to get any promised warranties in writing. They should specify which parts of the work are covered and the duration of the warranty.*
 - **Scheduling the work:** *The contract should specify an approximate starting date and completion date for the project.*
 - **Scheduling the payments:** *Make sure the payment schedule is based on the contractor's performance. Never pay ahead of the contractor's work.*
 - **Keep a job file:** *Keep a file of all papers relating to the project.*
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If paying “up front” money, homeowners should give no more than 10 per cent or \$1,000.00—whichever is less.

For the most part, the majority of licensed contractors do a great job; and research and common sense will avoid heartache later.

Homeowners should begin to outline their landscaping plans at least 30 days before they wish to begin—factoring in budget, design, themes, health matters such as allergies, climate (we are zoned 7 & 8), fire safety, personal preferences, and use of native plants. Space is also an important factor. You may desire to have a large majestic oak; however, you need to take into consideration, such things as the root system that may get into the sewer, crack the concrete, or even lift your foundation. Instead, there are shrubs that can be standardized into tree forms such as crape myrtles, pittosporums, Mahonias, Toyons, holly, bay laurels, and red buds, just to name a few; and don't forget the use of native plants along with wildflowers local to Mariposa County such as yarrow, rudbeckia-Black-eyed Susan, and lupine which are already well adapted to this region.

If you are on a limited budget, bear in mind that you can put in the basics and build on it later. A well-planned landscape, done right initially, will be a savings in the future.

The UCCE Master Gardeners of Mariposa County are planning their 1st ANNUAL PLANT & GARDEN ART SALE EXTRAVEGANZA at the Floriculture Building at the Fairgrounds on Saturday and Sunday, May 6th & 7th from 9:00 a.m.— 4:00 p.m., We will have many landscaping plants, houseplants, veggies, grasses, as well as pottery, bird houses, and a bevy of other wonderful garden attractions. The public is invited to come browse and purchase gardening items in this Master Gardener fundraiser.

As we gear up for spring in the garden, our office hours have changed. Master Gardeners are in the office every Tuesday and Thursday, from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm. We welcome you to stop in at 5009 Fairgrounds Road with your gardening questions or problems.

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